

REMARKS

Claims 1-9 are pending the present application. Claim 1 is amended above. No new matter is added by the claim amendment. Entry is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-9 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Ejiri (U.S. Patent No. 6,770,974) in view of Applicant Admitted Prior Art (AAPA). Reconsideration and removal of the rejections are respectfully requested.

In the present invention as claimed in amended independent claim 1, an electrode line structure of a semiconductor device comprises electrode lines, each including an “insulating plug” that has an “upper surface” that is “at a same level” as an “upper surface of the first line unit and an upper surface of the second line unit.” This feature is illustrated at least at FIG. 4 of the present specification. In this example, an electrode line 130 includes a conductive layer 105 and a hard mask layer 110, and an insulating plug bisects the electrode line 130 into first and second line units 120a, 120b (see FIG. 4 and page 6, lines 2-7 of the present specification). In this manner, an “upper surface” of the insulating plug 127 is at a “same level” as an “upper surface” of the first line unit 120A and at a “same level” as an “upper surface” of the second line unit 120B (see FIG. 4 of the present specification).

It is submitted that the combination of Ejiri and AAPA fails to teach or suggest an “insulating plug having an upper surface that is at a same level as an upper surface of the first line unit and an upper surface of the second line unit,” as claimed in amended independent claim 1. Instead, Ejiri discloses an insulating film 24 that fills a recess surrounded by a dummy electrode 18c and covers the surface of upper electrode 22 formed above a lower electrode 18b (see Ejiri, FIG. 13 and column 21, lines 43-49). An upper surface of the insulating film 24 of Ejiri is not at a “same level” as an “upper surface” of the lower electrode 18b (referred to in the Office Action at page 2, last paragraph as a “first line unit”). AAPA likewise fails to teach or suggest this feature since AAPA does not teach or suggest such an “insulating plug,” as claimed.

Accordingly, it is submitted that Ejiri and AAPA, taken alone or in combination, fail to teach or suggest the invention set forth in the amended claims. In particular, neither reference, taken alone or in combination, teaches a "insulating plug having an upper surface that is at a same level as an upper surface of the first line unit and the upper surface of the second line unit," as claimed in amended independent claim 1.

Since the combination of Ejiri and AAPA fails to teach or suggest the invention set forth in claim 1, amended independent claim 1 is believed to be allowable over the cited references. Accordingly, reconsideration and removal of the rejection under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) based on the combination of Ejiri and AAPA, and allowance of amended independent claim 1, are therefore respectfully requested. With regard to dependent claims 2-9, it follows that these claims should inherit the allowability of independent claim 1 from which they depend.

Closing Remarks

It is submitted that all claims are in condition for allowance, and such allowance is respectfully requested. If prosecution of the application can be expedited by a telephone conference, the Examiner is invited to call the undersigned at the number given below.

Respectfully submitted,

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